

Giardiasis

What is giardiasis?

Giardiasis is a diarrheal illness caused by a microscopic parasite, *Giardia intestinalis*. It lives in the intestine of infected humans or animals and is commonly found on surfaces or in soil, food, or water that has been contaminated with infected feces.

How is giardiasis spread?

- Accidentally swallowing *Giardia* picked up from surfaces (such as bathroom fixtures, changing tables, diaper pails, or toys) contaminated with feces from an infected person or animal.
- Drinking water or using ice made from contaminated sources (e.g., lakes, streams, poorly monitored or maintained wells).
- Swallowing recreational water contaminated with *Giardia*. Recreational water includes water in swimming pools, water parks, hot tubs or spas, fountains, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, or streams that can be contaminated with feces or sewage from humans or animals.
- Eating uncooked food contaminated with *Giardia*.
- Having contact with someone who is ill with giardiasis.

What are the symptoms of giardiasis?

Symptoms of giardiasis normally begin 1 to 3 weeks after becoming infected. *Giardia* infection can cause a variety of intestinal signs or symptoms which include diarrhea, gas, greasy stools that tend to float, stomach cramps, and nausea. These symptoms may lead to weight loss and dehydration. Some people with *Giardia* infection have no symptoms at all.

In otherwise healthy people, symptoms of giardiasis may last 2 to 6 weeks. Occasionally, symptoms may last longer.

How is giardiasis diagnosed?

Your health care provider will likely ask you to submit stool samples to check for the parasite. Because *Giardia* can be difficult to diagnose, your provider might ask you to submit multiple stool specimens collected over a few days.

What is the treatment for giardiasis?

Several prescription drugs are available to treat *Giardia* infection. Although *Giardia* can infect all people, young children and pregnant women might be more susceptible to dehydration resulting from diarrhea and should drink plenty of fluids while ill. Rapid loss of fluids from diarrhea can be especially life threatening to infants. Parents should talk to their health care providers about treatment options for infants.

How can giardiasis be prevented?

- Practice good hygiene – frequently washing hands, especially after going to the bathroom or changing diapers.
- To reduce the risk of spreading the disease, children should be out of school or day care until the diarrhea has stopped.
- Infected food service, patient care, and day care workers should be off work until they are no longer infected.
- At recreational water venues (for example, pools or beaches), do not swim if you have diarrhea, shower before entering the water, and take children for frequent bathroom breaks and check their diapers often.
- Do not swallow water from pools, lakes, rivers, ponds, or streams.
- Do not use or drink water or ice when traveling in countries where the water supply might be unsafe.
- Avoid eating raw or uncooked foods when traveling to countries with poor food and water treatment.
- Prevent contact and contamination with feces during sex.

How do I get more information on giardiasis?

Calhoun County Public Health Department

Phone: (269) 969-6383

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Phone: 800-CDC-INFO

Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/giardia/index.html>

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This fact sheet is meant to provide general health information and is not intended to be medical advice or otherwise take the place of your doctor's orders or to diagnose your specific health problems. Check with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your health.

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